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AUTHOR Lindemann, Erika
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ABSTRACT

Archival research gives students opportunities to appreciate original documents and artifacts, teaching them how to access materials, to treat them with care, and to invest them with meaning, and demonstrating the partnership researchers develop with librarians. Three suggested writing assignments introduce students to special collections, offering concepts and ways of working that characterize research in several disciplines. The assignments are: (1) document editing; (2) describing, preparing an annotated bibliography, and doing background research for an archival museum object; and (3) research and reconstruction of historical events utilizing primarily newspaper archives and microfilm. The writing assignments are attached. (EF)

Playing in the Archives: Pleasures, Perils, and Possibilities for Teaching.

by Erika Lindemann

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Playing in the Archives:
Pleasures, Perils, and Possibilities for Teaching
CCCC Annual Convention, Minneapolis, 14 April 2000

How many of you have worked in an archives or special collection before? Do you remember how you learned to navigate your way around? If you're like me, your graduate coursework ill prepared you to access relevant manuscript collections, handle fragile documents properly, decipher curious hand writing, form educated guesses about missing text, and locate important secondary sources to help contextualize the documents you were reading. Though my graduate program required me to take a course in bibliography and research methods, it never walked me past the card catalogue into those areas of the library that now hold particular fascination for me. And why should students wait until graduate school to handle their first manuscript? Special collections contain important, intrinsically interesting materials for college students at all levels to work with. Playing in the archives offers them excellent opportunities to pose and solve intellectual problems that other methods of research cannot.

This afternoon I want to describe three writing assignments that introduce students to special collections. Designed carefully, such assignments offer students experience with concepts and ways of working that characterize research in several disciplines. Such work also promotes a respect for documents and other artifacts as well as the reference tools that help us give them meaning. The first assignment lays out a documentary editing project based on the writing of nineteenth-century students. The second asks first-year composition students to investigate the origins of an object housed in a campus museum. The third involves at-risk students in examining significant events in the history of their university and community. Each assignment makes use of a different special collection at UNC-Chapel Hill. Your campus may not have precisely the same kinds of resources, but every place boasts similar sandboxes to play in--a museum, an archives, a local historical association's exhibit--so if the three assignments cannot be transported exactly to your classroom, I feel confident that they can be adapted to the special circumstances of your campus. Let us now turn to the handouts.

I begin with an assignment developed for our graduate research methods class. The course had for several years included a documentary editing project, not because we expect graduate students to pursue this specialized field but because we want them to understand the processes that create the published texts read in graduate school. When I began teaching the course, I developed a new documentary editing assignment based on my research into the writing of UNC's ante-bellum students and drawing on manuscripts in the Southern Historical Collection and the University Archives. I prepared for each student a folder containing photocopies of from one to three short documents, a total of approximately four manuscript pages. The assignment asked students to transcribe, edit, and annotate the documents. Everyone also had to write a brief introduction that placed the documents in some sort of context, introduced the writer, and explained editorial decisions. Most of the manuscripts were previously unpublished letters written by ante-bellum UNC students, but the folders also contained compositions written for the professor of rhetoric, speeches given in the debating societies, and excerpts from students' diaries. I selected materials that I thought would interest students, that would be relatively

easy to read, and that offered interesting editorial problems to solve. Students had access to the original documents, and librarians working in the Southern Historical Collection spent one class period explaining how to retrieve and handle the manuscripts and where to find useful information for annotating them. In writing up their assignments, students consulted articles in scholarly publications, which served as models for presenting editions of manuscript materials.

The graduate students enjoyed this assignment more than any other in the course. It was popular because it explained basic principles and procedures of documentary editing without fussing too much about technicalities. The project helped students appreciate the intellectual work that goes into editing primary texts, including literary works and editions of letters, journals, and other kinds of papers. For some students the project aroused curiosity about letters and diaries kept in family trunks and attics. Other students took on related projects resulting in one masters thesis, two doctoral dissertations, and several scholarly articles. Though documentary editing projects for graduate students are not a new idea, basing them on student writing is unconventional. The assignment underscored the value of including student voices in institutional histories. It created a desire to know more about what life in the ante-bellum academy was like, why students attended college then, and what became of them. Though the assignment was originally intended for graduate students, I plan to adapt it for students in a first-year seminar next year. The trick is to select documents that are interesting and then help students make meaning of the records their classmates of long ago left behind.

The second assignment is intended for students enrolled in English 12. This second-semester composition focuses on writing for the sciences, social sciences, and humanities. English 12 is organized into three units, and each unit consists of a unit project preceded by two shorter assignments that feed into or prepare for the unit project. Michael Claxton's social science unit introduces first-year students to some of the principles of historical archaeology by examining an artifact in the North Carolina Collection Gallery. The Gallery is a campus museum. It houses rotating exhibits of some 15,000 objects, among them photographs, Audubon bird prints, oil portraits, currency collections, ship models, political memorabilia, military equipment, and even a plaster death mask of Napoleon Bonaparte, originally owned by the emperor's personal physician. Michael worked with the Gallery's curators to arrange a tour of the museum and to compile a list of objects that students could use as topics for their projects. The goal of the unit was to write a four-to-six page history of the object, from the time of its manufacture until the time it went on display in the Gallery. As Michael explains in the unit project assignment, "should you wish to write about a statue of Sir Walter Ralegh, you could research his life and times, or find out information about artistic sculpture during the period, or information about the materials used. You may be able to find records of previous owners of the statue as well."

The first short assignment of Michael's unit asks students to write a careful description of the object. Michael prepared students for this assignment by bringing several small antiques of his own to class so that groups of students, working together, could practice the skills of observation and description needed for the short assignment. The second short assignment calls for an annotated bibliography of sources students had consulted in tracing the history of the Gallery objects they had selected. These

bibliographies listed the usual book chapters and articles of typical research assignments, but they also included unconventional materials such as biographies, pamphlets, accession records, archival documents, and on-line sources.

Planning, drafting, and revising these two short assignments took about three weeks, and Gallery curators were indispensable advisors as students constructed histories of their objects. The third and fourth weeks of the unit were devoted to preparing the final unit project. During this period students discussed options for presenting their findings, met with Michael in individual conferences, reviewed conventions for citing sources using APA style, and workshopped drafts with members of their writing group.

The goal of this project was not to turn first-year students into archeologists, but rather to introduce them to principles of description, to methods of investigating the origins of these artifacts, and to ways of writing necessary to succeed in certain college courses. Michael reports that his students enjoyed the assignment and demonstrated in their unit projects confident, successful control of important conventions observed in writing for the social sciences. Many papers, he thought, were especially well researched, despite the sometimes obscure topics--the construction of death masks, for example. Two problems are worth anticipating. Though museum curators are eager to help students with such projects, they need to be involved from the beginning. Some artifacts will be difficult for first-year students to research, but museum staff can guide you in developing a list of interesting objects to offer students as the basis for such an assignment. A second caution is to avoid taxing the resources of such a facility. Our Gallery can handle approximately 40 students at a time without having folks trip over each other. Careful scheduling may be necessary to overcome severe constraints on space and staff time.

The third assignment also works well in a first-year composition class, but it originally was designed for a group of students enrolled in the University's bridge program. The goal of the unit is to give students practice researching, thinking, and writing as historians. As Rick Incorvati designed it, the five-week unit gives students practice with two central activities: first, the careful recovery of facts and, second, the interpretation of those facts. The theme for the unit is the civil rights movement in Chapel Hill, a topic Rick selected because most of the students in his class were African-Americans. Other historical topics with an impact on the University or community could also be chosen: the admission of women and minority students, for example, or free-speech protests, or Viet Nam war demonstrations. To guide his students' research, Rick prepared a time line of local and national events relevant to the civil rights movement and spanning from 1951 to 1995. The time line eventually became the basis of a Web site, with the students' final projects linked to the time line and elaborating the events listed there. After discussing the time line with his class, Rick asked each student to chose a different local event to investigate. As with the North Carolina Gallery unit, Rick's civil rights unit comprised two short assignments leading into a longer unit project.

For the first short assignment, students collected relevant facts surrounding their event and wrote a 500-word account of it. Because most of these facts appeared in newspapers of the period, students received training in locating and using microfilmed newspapers housed in the North Carolina Collection. The North Carolina Collection also houses clipping files, census records, books by and about North Carolinians, and biographical dictionaries. This specialized collection, not the formidable large research

library, was the best place to conduct the primary research for an objective report about the local event students had chosen.

For the second short assignment, students selected a comparable national event to investigate, an event that received more attention in the press, perhaps, or that influenced local civil rights activities. A student writing in the first assignment about the boycott of the local Colonial Drug Store by black students attending Lincoln High School might choose for the second assignment the sit-in at the Greensboro Woolworth's lunch counter by four black students from North Carolina A & T College. After selecting a national event, students had to locate two published sources that differed in their interpretations of the event. They then wrote a four-to-five-page review of these secondary sources. The object of this exercise was to examine how professional historians attribute meaning to historical facts, how they select evidence to support their claims, how they construct sometimes conflicting views of history. The published sources also served as models for the unit project because they showed students what to emulate and to avoid in writing historical accounts.

The unit project, then, invited students to interpret their chosen local moment in history by using their knowledge of scholarship on a related national event as a touchstone. In a seven-page paper that eventually became part of the class' Web site, students offered a historical account and analysis of an important moment in Chapel Hill's civil rights history.

Students undertaking this assignment found it both interesting and challenging. They felt a sense of accomplishment simply in learning to use the microfilm reader. But they also were impressed by finding information that, as one student put it, "hasn't been researched and no one knows about it." Investigating local history also gave students a personal connection to the past. "It is always good to know about where you came from," wrote one student on the course evaluation. Another student found it "very sad that Black history really isn't taught in school, and that when you get in college you have to search for the history." Another student claimed, "I was influenced by what my ancestors went through, and still have the determination to achieve their goals."

This personal connection between events of the past and students of today is the major benefit of encouraging students to play in the archives. As these assignments also illustrate, archival research gives students opportunities to appreciate original documents and artifacts. It teaches them how to access these materials, treat them with care, and invest them with meaning. It demonstrates the partnership researchers develop with librarians, whose expertise can remove most of the frustration from working in special collections. Assignments such as these lead students into parts of the library that they probably would never enter on their own. Yet, with careful planning, these activities can offer our students important practice conducting meaningful research. In an age when many students regard the Internet as the only source of evidence for any project, students need to know that research involves making knowledge, interpreting artifacts and sources, solving problems raised by evidence, experiencing the excitement of discovery. Playing in the archives can be a wonderful way to introduce students to the pleasures of research that all of us enjoy.

- Put yourself in the reader's place. What questions will come to mind? What information is essential to know? Where should it appear?
- Try to give your reader as much contextual information as the original reader of the material would have had.
- Let the reader know how an event turns out.
- Annotate people (relatives and public figures), briefly explaining who they are.
- Translate foreign phrases.
- Supply full bibliographical references (MLA style) for quotations (if you can track them down) and published works.
- Use other letters, diaries, and published materials as aids.
- Cite the collection so that readers may consult the original document.
- Avoid annoing terms, people, places, and events that can be found in a standard desk dictionary or desk encyclopedia.

The Assignment

This assignment gives you a glimpse of life on this campus from the founding of the University to the Civil War. Unpublished writing by students and faculty members provides the primary materials for this project. Assume that the documents in this folder merit publication as an article in a scholarly journal whose readers have some interest in the University but may know little about this period of its history.

The Schedule

Please refer to the following schedule so that you can complete the assignment on time:

Tuesday, 5 October--Today we will discuss the purposes of documentary editing, examine a sample document, and go over the assignment. Begin transcribing your documents.

Thursday, 7 October--We will meet with John White (Southern Historical Collection) and Harry McKown (North Carolina Collection) in the Assembly Room, to the left inside the front door of Wilson Library. John and Harry will explain procedures for consulting the original documents you are working with and will introduce you to secondary sources that may help you annotate the material. If we have time, we will visit the Rare Books exhibit area where similar materials on UNC student life have been assembled for the University's Bicentennial. Continue transcribing your documents. Check your transcription *carefully* against the originals.

Tuesday, 12 October--Meet in GL 222. We will return to our sample document and discuss problems in transcribing it. We will survey methods of treating texts, conventions for punctuation, and other aspects of editing.

representing textual problems, and guidelines for emendations. Finish your transcriptions this week.

Thursday, 14 October--Meet in GL 222. We will discuss types of annotations, ways to present your edited documents, and options for writing the introduction to your article. Finish annotations this week.

Tuesday, 19 October--No class. Sign up for a conference with me, if needed, on my office door (GL 434) or via e-mail.

24 October--Due date

Your Documents The outside of your folder indicates which collection of papers in the University Archives the Southern Historical Collection holds the original documents. You will want to consult the originals and check your transcription against them, not against the photocopy. The numbered black notebooks in the Southern Historical Collection provide additional information about your documents. Consulting these finding aids or "survey books" will save you time, especially in developing biographical information about your documents' author.

Annotation

Annotations
What should you annotate? Here are some suggestions:
Make a record of what you don't know as you read the material for the first time.
Ask, "What can I reasonably expect my readers to know?"

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Annotations What should you annotate? Here are some suggestions:
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Paper # 1
Length: 4 - 6 pages, typed, double-spaced
Due dates: January 31 -- 1st draft
February 7 -- 2nd draft
February 10 -- Final version

Short Assignment 1
Length: one to two typed pages, double-spaced
Due date: Friday, January 17

The purpose of this assignment is to get you started working toward the final paper. After you have chosen the object which will be the subject of Paper 1, write a one-page physical description of the object. Describe only what you can see (If you are writing about an item in the North Carolina Collection Gallery, you will not be allowed to touch the object).

The first page should contain a thorough, objective description of every detail that you can see, no matter how trivial it seems. Do not discuss any information which may be available on the museum identification card, simply describe the physical details. Successful papers will leave no details unrecorded and will be written in a formal, impersonal tone. On the second page, give a series of questions about the object that you would like to answer, and speculate as to how you would find the answers to these questions.

Make a visit to the North Carolina Collection Gallery in Wilson Library, or to another local museum. Find an object on display that interests you, and write a history of that object, from the time of its manufacture until the time that it went on display in the museum. You must find out (or perhaps conjecture) how the object was originally used, and your paper must also contain some historical background about the object, its owner, or the period in which it was used, as well as a detailed physical description of the object. Use the library resources to research the object and its background, and write a 4 - 6 page paper which presents this information in a well-organized fashion.

For example, should you wish to write about a statue of Sir Walter Raleigh, you could research his life and times, or find out information about artistic sculpture during the period, or information about the materials used. You may be able to find records of previous owners of the statue as well. Or, if you want to write about an object connected with the University, you could use the North Carolina collection in Wilson library to research a particular period in the University's history, or the biography of a certain person associated with the object. The curators of the North Carolina Collection Gallery have expressed willingness to help you with your research.

Although in many cases you will not be allowed to touch the object, you must write as careful a description of it as possible, describing its dimensions, materials used in its construction, its present condition, and so on. You must cite all of your sources using APA style. You may fill gaps in your object's history with logical speculation, but only make guesses which you can base on the available evidence. Your audience for this paper can either be UNC archaeology students or the readers of a magazine about antiques.

Another option: You can also write about a family heirloom, or some antique in your family's possession, especially if its history is well documented, and if you have the opportunity to examine it firsthand.

Short Assignment 2
Length: two typed pages, double-spaced
Due date: Friday, January 24

The purpose of this assignment is to get you started (if you haven't already started) on the research for Paper 1. The assignment has two parts. On the first half-page or page, give a bibliography of possible sources of information for your paper. List all the sources that you can find which might have information relevant to the object you are studying. These may include books, chapters in books, encyclopedias, journal articles, biographies, pamphlets, archival documents, and on-line sources. Though you do not have to use every source you find in your final paper, please list as many sources as possible. We will go over the format for a bibliography in class.

For the second part, choose one of these sources and read it (or at least the parts of it that are relevant). Then write a one to one-and-a-half-page summary and evaluation of the information you learned. Be sure that you identify the source and make it clear how this information relates to the object you are studying. How well does this source apply to your research, and what are the author's credentials?

English 12, Unit 3 Assignment
Civil Rights in Chapel Hill

In this unit you will have an opportunity to practice the research methods, thinking processes, and written conventions of historians. Your subject for this unit will be one of many civil rights events that have helped to shape this campus and the town of Chapel Hill. Your goal will be to uncover the facts surrounding the event you choose and to interpret their meaning or significance.

Short Assignment 1
Length: 500 words
Due date: April 1

Choose an event on the civil rights time line that we have reviewed in class and collect as many facts about it as you can by consulting the newspapers housed in the North Carolina Collection. Then write a summary of the event for your classmates. Do not feel that you must include every detail--no historical account ever does--but try to anticipate questions your readers might have and include enough information to answer them.

March 30: We will spend part of the day in the North Carolina Collection to begin research in primary sources.

March 23: Prepare an outline of the events or facts you plan to include in your summary. Bring the outline together with notes and copies of your sources to class. You will discuss your project with group mates and others working on related events.

March 25: First draft due; we will have a draft workshop in class. Turn in your introductory paragraph.

Short Assignment 2
Length: 700-1000 words
Due date: April 10

Though few historical studies treat the specific event that you are researching, many civil rights activities received national attention. Select an event that is similar to the local topic you are investigating and find at least two sources that discuss the event in some detail. To find an appropriate event, you might browse through the two books on reserve: Robert Weisbrot's *Marching Toward Freedom, 1957-1965* and Lester A. Sobel's *Civil Rights*. We will discuss possible sources in conference. Write a review of your two sources in which you do three things:

- Summarize the facts that are known with some certainty about the event. If people disagree about the facts, tell us.
- Give an account of how each writer interprets the facts. How and why are they significant for each writer?
- Assess the value of your sources. Which account would you recommend to someone who wanted to learn more about this event? Why?

April 3: First draft due.
April 8: Second draft due.
April 10: Final draft due.

Unit Project
Length: 1400 words
Due date: April 24

Write an account of a local event and analyze its significance in the civil right movement. Your account should responsibly convey the relevant facts and should offer an interpretation of those facts. You may (but are not required to) relate your account to a similar event that received national attention. Document your paper with at least five sources. Because your account will become a link in the class' civil rights Website, assume that your UNC students are your audience.

A successful paper will show a clear, logical sense of organization, contain a thesis statement that makes an interpretive claim and conveys the focus of the paper, demonstrate responsible and effective use of evidence, develop unified paragraphs, and contain few errors in documentation, spelling, and punctuation.

April 15: First draft due. We will discuss documenting sources in class. For homework, select a paragraph from your draft and revise it using two of the strategies discussed in your textbook.

April 17: Second draft due.

April 22: Unit project due.

April 24: We will format your paper for the web page.

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Time Line of Civil Rights Events in Chapel Hill

1951 June. Four black students admitted to the UNC Law School. One of them, Floyd McKissick, becomes NAACP legal counsel and leader of civil rights activities in Chapel Hill and Durham. The first black woman is accepted to the graduate program in Spanish.

October. A black law student protests segregated seating at the football stadium. A social event is canceled to avoid integration.

1953 Herbert Robinson becomes the first black elected to the Chapel Hill Board of Aldermen.

1954 Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka renders separate but equal public schools unconstitutional.

1955 Three students from Durham become UNC's first black undergraduates.

Undergraduate organizations protest the administration's giving black students segregated seating at football games.

December 1. Rosa Parks sits in the white section of a bus in Montgomery, A.L.

1958 Robert Seymour becomes the first integrated church in Chapel Hill.

1960 February 1. Four black students from North Carolina A & T College in Greensboro begin a nationwide sit-in by demanding service at a Woolworth's lunch counter.

Students from Lincoln High School, an all-black school in Chapel Hill, begin a sit-in at the Colonial Drug Store.

April. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC or "Snick") begins at Shaw University in Raleigh; later, SNCC moves to Spelman College in Atlanta.

May. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., speaks at UNC in Hill Hall.

1961 Picketing begins at the Carolina Theater to protest segregated service and the theater's refusing to let a black school group see *Porgy and Bess*, a movie with an all-black cast.

James Farmer and other undertake a freedom ride, traveling on a bus to segregated bus terminals throughout the South.

July. Chapel Hill becomes the first community to adopt a voluntary plan for desegregating its public schools.

1962 The University of Mississippi admits its first black student.

1963 Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., is arrested in Birmingham and writes his famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail."

April 5. Pat Cusick and John Dunne, two white UNC undergraduates, begin picketing segregated Chapel Hill businesses on Franklin St.

May 3. Committee for Open Business (COB) holds its first meeting. Nonviolent protests begin to escalate.

May 25. COB organizes a series of marches down Franklin St. targeting segregated businesses.

June 25. Chapel Hill Board of Aldermen defeat a public accommodations ordinance.

July 21. The first large-scale sit-in takes place at the Merchants Association.

August 28. Over 250,000 congregate in Washington, DC, for the March on Washington, two busloads of Chapel Hill students and citizens make the trip.

December. The Chapel Hill Freedom Committee is organized to coordinate all area civil rights groups—CORE, NAACP, SNCC, SCLC, SPU, and the Southern Conference Education Fund. John Dunne chairs the Committee.

December. Intensive sit-ins begin at area stores.

UNC student Pat Cusick begins a one-month sentence in a white jail and goes on a hunger strike while demanding to be placed in an integrated or black prison.

1964 January 5. Pat Cusick is released.

January 14? Following a freedom march from Duke to UNC, James Farmer, National Director of CORE demands a public accommodations ordinance or promises a "D-Day" on February 1, the anniversary of the Greensboro sit-in.

The Chapel Hill Board of Aldermen defeat the public accommodations ordinance for the second time.

February 1. Students and townspeople escalate demonstrations with a sit-in on Franklin St.

February 8. Floyd McKissick leads a group of 110 black activists to a sit-in in the intersection of Franklin and Columbia Sts.; smaller groups block other intersections.

July. President Lyndon Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act into law.

Segregation ends in UNC dormitories.

1967 UNC students form the Black Student Movement (BSM).

1968 The BSM demands of UNC administrators a curriculum in African-American Studies. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., is assassinated.

Charlie Scott becomes the first black UNC basketball player.

1969 Howard Lee is elected Chapel Hill's first black mayor.

The BSM begins publishing *Black Ink*, a magazine covering black students' concerns.

A curriculum in African-American studies is established.

1973 The University's General Administration devises a plan for desegregating all colleges in the system.

1988 The Sonja Haynes Stone Black Cultural Center is established in the Student Union Building.

1991 The predominantly black housekeeping staff forms the Housekeepers Association to lobby for better pay and training. Student groups soon support the cause.

The Class of 1985 gives the sculpture The Student Body to UNC; the BSM and other groups protest the sculpture's representation of minority students.

The BSM pushes for a free-standing black cultural center, staging a sit-in in the Chancellor's office.

December. Students organize a boycott of Rite Aid for placing products used by blacks in a location under surveillance.

1992 The Student Body sculpture is moved to a less prominent location, and the sculpture's black male basketball player is stolen.

1994 UNC administrators approve plans for a free-standing black cultural center.

1995 Students continue to protest the housekeepers' low wages and benefits.

October 16. UNC men travel to the Million Man March in Washington, DC.



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FAX: 812-856-5512
e-mail: erics@indiana.edu
WWW: http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec/

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